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ABSTRACT

Many graduates who have the academic ability to continue their schooling beyond high school do not enroll in higher education. This phenomenon has been referred to as "talent loss." The challenges involved in financing higher education partially contribute to talent loss and its pervasiveness among poor students, but they fall short of providing a complete explanation. This study explicates other possible sources of talent loss. Dual methodologies are used to examine critical sources of talent loss among students who perform well academically but are placed at risk of academic failure because they are also from low socioeconomic status families. Drawing from national panel data (the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988) as well as eight in-depth interviews with guidance counselors from an impoverished urban school district, the study identified factors that contribute to postsecondary enrollment. These are: (1) parental influence; (2) exposure to a high content curriculum; and (3) the availability of school resources. Implications of this research for policy, practice, theory, and further study are discussed. (Contains 10 tables and 18 references.) (SLD)

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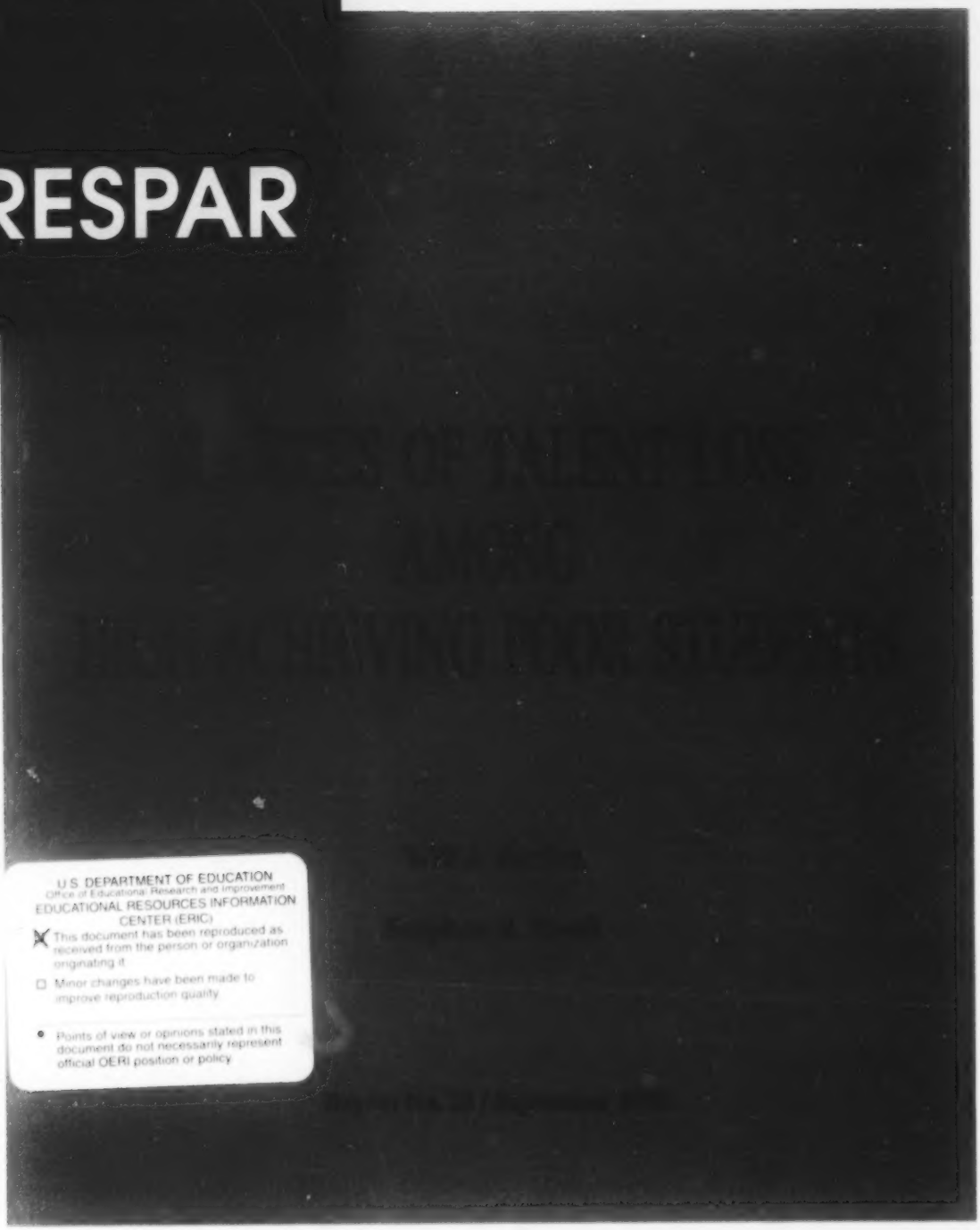

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CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS PLACED AT RISK

Johns Hopkins University & Howard University

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SOURCES OF TALENT LOSS AMONG HIGH-ACHIEVING POOR STUDENTS

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Report No. 23

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The Center

Every child has the capacity to succeed in school and in life. Yet far too many children, especially those from poor and minority families, are placed at risk by school practices that are based on a sorting paradigm in which some students receive high-expectations instruction while the rest are relegated to lower quality education and lower quality futures. The sorting perspective must be replaced by a "talent development" model that asserts that all children are capable of succeeding in a rich and demanding curriculum with appropriate assistance and support.

The mission of the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR) is to conduct the research, development, evaluation, and dissemination needed to transform schooling for students placed at risk. The work of the Center is guided by three central themes — ensuring the success of all students at key development points, building on students' personal and cultural assets, and scaling up effective programs — and conducted through seven research and development programs and a program of institutional activities.

CRESPAR is organized as a partnership of Johns Hopkins University and Howard University, in collaboration with researchers at the University of California at Santa Barbara, University of California at Los Angeles, University of Chicago, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, University of Memphis, Haskell Indian Nations University, and University of Houston-Clear Lake.

CRESPAR is supported by the National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students (At-Risk Institute), one of five institutes created by the Educational Research, Development, Dissemination and Improvement Act of 1994 and located within the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) at the U.S. Department of Education. The At-Risk Institute supports a range of research and development activities designed to improve the education of students at risk of educational failure because of limited English proficiency, poverty, race, geographic location, or economic disadvantage.

Abstract

Many graduates who have the academic ability to continue their schooling beyond high school do not enroll in higher education. This phenomenon has been referred to as *talent loss*. The challenges involved in financing higher education partially contribute to talent loss and its pervasiveness among poor students, but they fall short of providing a complete explanation. This study explicates other possible sources of talent loss. The authors use dual methodologies to examine critical sources of talent loss among students who perform well academically, but are placed at risk of academic failure because they are also from low SES families. Drawing from national panel data as well as eight in-depth interviews with guidance counselors from an impoverished, urban school district, the authors suggest that factors such as parental influence, exposure to a high content curriculum, and the availability of school resources all play a part in postsecondary enrollment. The implications of this research for policy, practice, theory, and further study are discussed.

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Introduction

Many young adults who have the academic ability to continue their schooling beyond high school do not enroll in postsecondary educational institutions. The term *talent loss* is often used to describe this phenomenon and there are complex reasons why it occurs (Plank & Jordan, 1997). It has been well-documented in the research literature that talent loss is concentrated among poor and minority students. Studies from several decades reveal an inverse relationship between SES and talent loss (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1969; Manski & Wise, 1983; Hanson, 1994). The financial costs of higher education partially explain talent loss and its pervasiveness among poor students, but they fall short of providing a complete explanation. This report explicates other sources of talent loss by combining an analysis of recent national survey data with interviews of high school counselors.

The present study is a continuation of earlier research on the impact of information, guidance, and certain actions of students, schools, and their parents on postsecondary enrollment. The previous reports (Plank & Jordan 1996, 1997) examined the National Educational Longitudinal Survey of 1988 (NELS:88) data to investigate the likelihood of students reaching each of four statuses within the first two years after high school: (1) enrollment at a four-year college or university, either full-time or part-time, (2) full-time enrollment at a two-year college, (3) part-time enrollment at a two-year college, or (4) no enrollment at a postsecondary school.

We used multinomial logistic regression models to estimate the effect of socioeconomic status on postsecondary enrollment, over and above a set of background variables including high school achievement on standardized tests. The effect of SES was strongly positive and significant on the likelihood of ending up in a four-year school rather than any of the other three categories. We then added three successive blocks of variables to the model to see what effects measures of social capital, school guidance, and actions would have on enrollment in higher education. Further, we examined the degree to which these successive blocks of variables were intervening mechanisms through which part of the relationship between SES and postsecondary enrollment operated.

The findings of Plank and Jordan (1996, 1997) revealed positive and significant effects of factors such as the level and timing of discussions between parents and students about school events and postsecondary plans on actual enrollment in higher education. In addition, variables such as parent-school communication, parent communication with other parents, parental encouragement to prepare for the SAT or ACT, early planning and

subsequent taking of the SAT or ACT, and specific types of guidance and help from the school in investigating and applying for financial aid and college admission were shown to have a significant impact on postsecondary destinations. Further, these intervening variables explained as much as 35% of the relationship between SES and postsecondary enrollment in terms of odds.

The initial study of talent loss inspired several important research questions which we explore below. The first set of questions relates to what would happen if we focused solely on students in the highest achievement group across the full spectrum of SES. The highest achievement group comprises a set of students who, given current admission standards, should all be academically prepared for postsecondary education. Would the relationship between SES and postsecondary enrollment be especially salient for these students? Would aspects of information, guidance, and actions for these students help explain any observed relationship between SES and postsecondary enrollment? Would an estimated multinomial logit model predicting postsecondary enrollment look similar to the full longitudinal panel or would it be different in important ways? Second, building upon the focus on the impact of information and guidance, what more could we learn about the timing, quality, and quantity of information and guidance students receive during the high school years? Specifically, what could be learned about the relationships between students and high school guidance counselors?

Social Capital

The conceptual framework of the present study draws from social capital theory and research on the profession of high school guidance. To that end, the focus on the role of information and guidance in prompting key actions and thus facilitating postsecondary entry is consistent with a social capital perspective. Coleman (1988) defined social capital as a resource available to a person that exists in the structure of relations among people and which facilitates certain actions or activities. As an example of the influence of social capital, academic progress can be enhanced when the parents of students form a network of friends. Such a network fosters trust, expectations, and communication which can guide and monitor the students' academic development. Stanton-Salazar and Dornbush (1995) conceived of social capital in a similar manner. Their study refers to relationships from which an individual is potentially able to derive institutional support, particularly support that includes the delivery of knowledge-based resources. In analyzing the information networks of high school students, they examined relationships with institutional agents such as teachers,

counselors, social service workers, clergy, and adult family members. Examples of knowledge-based resources included guidance for college admission and job advancement.

Consistent with these definitions of social capital, preliminary investigations suggest that talent loss — and the relationship between SES and talent loss — can be explained to some extent by students' lack of social capital. Discussions between parents and child about school events, encouragement from parents to prepare for the SAT or ACT, conversations between parents and school personnel about a student's postsecondary plans, assistance from the school to a student in preparing college applications, and parents' use of information sources to learn about financial aid opportunities are among the things that cannot be present for a student without a certain level of social capital. That is, these things will be available only when relationships have been established to provide information and guidance. When such relationships have been forged, we hypothesize that they can be effective in reducing talent loss because they allow the knowledge and resources of adults and institutions to benefit adolescents who would not otherwise possess such knowledge and resources. However, when critical relationships have not been established — and we expect they often will not have been for students placed at risk — talent loss can be expected.

High School Guidance Counselors

A potential form of school-based social capital exists in the relationship between students and high school guidance counselors. The research literature provides some evidence that guidance is a critical factor in facilitating the transition into higher education, especially for economically at-risk students. Yonezawa (1996), in a study of the changing role of guidance counselors in schools undergoing structural reform, reviewed research which shows ways in which counselors have contributed to inequitable opportunities and outcomes among students. Although her study focuses on how the guidance function has been intertwined with track and ability group structures, and the ways students are steered toward one set of high school courses or another, Yonezawa's insights are also useful as we think about counselors' roles in college advising.

In addition, Yonezawa examined a body of research showing that counselors at times have used subjective characteristics such as student "background" or "perceived potential" to guide decisions about student placement and advising (Cicourel & Kituse, 1963; Rosenbaum, 1976). Counselors have then used such information to "cool-out" students' aspirations over time (Clark, 1960). Due in part to this research, counselors have garnered

an unenviable reputation as "the gatekeepers" of America's purportedly meritocratic school system (Erickson & Schultz, 1983).

However, there is an alternative explanation for why counselors sometimes help perpetuate inequalities in education. This explanation argues that counselors are unwillingly, and sometimes unwittingly, molded into gatekeeping roles by the structures and norms of their local school environment (Hart & Mayes, 1984). In these cases, counselors often become the unconscious "enforcers" of the school's philosophy. Often this educational philosophy is driven by a sorting and stratifying paradigm.

Yonezawa (1996) described four roles different from "gatekeeper" or "unwitting enforcer" that she has observed counselors adopting in the wake of detracking. Many counselors are often eager to abandon the undesirable role of gatekeeper and to adopt a range of roles characterized as: (1) salesperson, (2) tight-rope walker, (3) change agent, and (4) critical guide.

According to Yonezawa (1996), the *salesperson* follows a market-minded philosophy driven largely by a laissez-faire — let the student and parent choose — approach to guidance. Arguing that students are the best judges of their own abilities and motivations, salesperson-like counselors see students as clients or consumers who should be allowed to make important educational decisions for themselves. If students do not feel that they can successfully handle the most challenging academic paths, salespersons allow students to follow less challenging paths. A salesperson-like philosophy can free counselors from taking responsibility for students' placements, and matches some counselors' personal goals (and strong societal norms) for developing "responsible independent" or self-determining citizens (Patterson, 1971). Conversely, *tight-rope walkers* offer students a "freedom of choice," while still helping them to set "realistic" goals based on externally imposed requirements. While this approach somewhat resembles gatekeeping, unlike traditional gatekeepers, tight-rope walkers are different in that they tend to worry about operating from bounded notions of their students' capabilities and loath conveying any negative-sounding advice to their counselees.

In addition, Yonezawa contends that since the mid-1980s there has been encouragement for schools to utilize their counseling staff as potential *change agents*. This viewpoint sees counselors as individuals uniquely able to transform their schools' climates into educationally and culturally enriching environments (Kaplan & Geoffroy, 1990; Thomas, 1989). In contrast to their salesperson and tight-rope walking peers, a small number of counselors challenge existing school policies, improve access to information, and create more collegial school environments.

Although change agent counselors have traveled far from the gatekeeping counselors of old, counselors working as *critical guides* possess an even deeper critique of the sorting mechanisms of schooling, and are the only counselors who have successfully adopted what Giroux (1985) refers to as "truly transformative" educational roles. Critical guide counselors actively educate the students and families they serve about the "hidden curriculum" of course selection and college attendance as manifested in their local school context. Critical guide counselors feel particularly compelled to rework their roles and become more than mere information providers.

Rosenbaum, Miller, and Krei (1996) join Yonezawa in suggesting that roles of counselors have changed since the 1960s. They assert that counselors in earlier decades had the authority, and exercised their authority, to influence who applied to college. In contrast, contemporary counselors do not like giving students bad news about their future prospects, do not want the responsibility, and do not believe they have the authority to do it, especially when parents have opposing views. Instead, they advocate college for all and emphasize personal counseling, which allows them to avoid addressing unpleasant realities. In their cautionary conclusions, however, Rosenbaum and his colleagues warn that the current situation does not mean that students are free to pursue their goals, but rather that counselors' unwillingness to act as gatekeepers can prevent students from getting the information and advice they need to prepare for their futures.

Data and Methods

The present study uses multiple methodologies to explicate critical sources of talent loss among students who perform well academically, but who are also from low SES families. We draw from national panel data as well as a small set of in-depth interviews with practitioners within an impoverished, urban school district. First, we present an analysis of the NELS:88 data, where a combination of multinomial logistic regression models and descriptive statistics are used to examine the relationship between SES and postsecondary enrollment. Then this quantitative component is supported by interviews with eight counselors conducted at four urban, comprehensive high schools during the Spring of 1997. The flow of this report is somewhat unconventional in that we begin with an analysis of the statistical models, followed by descriptive statistics, and finally an analysis of interview data. The justification of organizing the report in this manner is that while the counselor interviews are less generalizable than the national data, they offer a more refined perspective on the

process of preparation, application, and enrollment in higher education, which is a core aspect of the study.

Multiple Regression

As mentioned, this research builds upon a recent study which used multinomial logistic regression models to predict the postsecondary enrollment of the graduating class of 1992 (Plank & Jordan, 1997). In examining the entire population (both high achievers and low achievers), we found that one of the reasons why many young adults do not continue their formal education immediately after high school is because they lack basic information about the necessary steps involved in the application and enrollment processes. The lack of critical information about higher education reflects a possible absence of effective school guidance and familial support. In the present study, we employ the basic structure of the models used in our earlier work to focus more closely on information and guidance as predictors of higher education enrollment for the highest achieving students — a subsample of students achieving in the top quintile, nationally.

Deciphering the Effects of SES

This component of the study is composed of a further analysis of the top achievement quintile of students in the NELS:88 longitudinal panel, approximately 2,500 weighted cases. The presentation of descriptive statistics is conducted in order to shed light upon the contexts within which students live and learn. Several factors measuring school-related and family-related sources of support for students are presented by SES quartiles. The focus is placed on student information, guidance, and actions, and how these vary across different levels of SES.

The Counselor Interviews

Interviews with eight guidance counselors in four urban, comprehensive high schools were conducted in the Spring of 1997. Each of the interviews was audiotaped and was approximately one hour to 90 minutes in length. They were conducted at the counselors' schools, most often in the counselor's office. The primary purpose of the interviews was to add insights to the study gained from experienced practitioners, whose main focus was on

serving at-risk students. The overwhelming majority of students in the high schools in the study do not progress directly to college after graduation.

The germane topics addressed during the counselor interviews were: (1) identifying "college-bound" students; (2) supporting, nurturing, and preparing students for higher education; and (3) the possibilities and limits of counselors in helping high-achieving students reach college. Paramount attention was placed on understanding how guidance counselors perceived their work, and their role in facilitating postsecondary enrollment among high-achieving, poor students. The interviews also probed the nature of the counselor's interactions with teachers, parents, and families as well as the larger community within which the school is embedded.

High-Achieving Students in NELS:88

Within the top achievement quintile, just as throughout the achievement continuum, talent loss is concentrated among low SES students. Specifically, Table 1 shows that nationally only 50% of students who were in the lowest SES quartile and the top quintile of high school achievement enrolled in four-year postsecondary schools as their first enrollment within the first two years after high school. About 22% enrolled full-time at two-year schools; 5.3% enrolled part-time at two-year schools; and 22.6% never enrolled within the first two years after high school. In contrast, talent loss was much less severe among high SES students in this top achievement group. Fully 86.6% enrolled in four-year schools. About 8% enrolled full-time at two-year schools; 2.8% enrolled part-time at two-year schools; and only 2.7% had never enrolled in a postsecondary school.

An analysis of information and guidance as predictors of postsecondary enrollment was elaborated in our earlier study for students throughout the achievement distribution (Plank & Jordan, 1996). Table 2 summarizes the independent variables in those models and presents an outline of the major findings. For each model, the estimated direct effects of SES on the odds of an individual's enrolling in a four-year school relative to each of the other three options is shown. These effects are shown as estimated for the full longitudinal panel first, and then for the highest achievement quintile.

TABLE 1

Postsecondary Destinations for the Top Achievement Quintile By SES Quartiles

SES Quartile	Proportion of Top Achievement Quintile†	4-yr	2-yr FT	2-yr PT	Never Enrolled
High	52.7	86.6	7.9	2.8	2.7
High-Mid	26.0	69.6	16.2	6.4	7.9
Low-Mid	16.2	57.3	19.8	3.3	19.5
Low	5.2	50.0	22.1	5.3	22.6

† Proportions do not sum to 100% due to rounding

The estimates for the highest achievement quintile were generated solely for the present study and have not been analyzed or reported previously. For our present purposes, we are primarily interested in two things: First, what is the magnitude of the SES effect when initially introduced in Model II? Second, what proportion of this initial SES effect is explained by the variables of Models III through V? In each case, we answer the questions with reference to the estimates seen for the full longitudinal panel.

The magnitude of the SES effect is somewhat larger for the highest achievement quintile than for the full longitudinal panel. Specifically, the effect of SES on the odds of enrolling in a four-year school rather than enrolling full-time in a two-year school was 24% stronger when Model II was estimated for just the top achievement quintile than when Model II was estimated for the full longitudinal panel (2.20/1.78=1.24). The effect of SES on the odds of enrolling in a four-year school rather than enrolling part-time in a two-year school was 18% stronger when Model II was estimated for just the top achievement quintile than when Model II was estimated for the full longitudinal panel (1.86/1.57= 1.18). The effect of SES on the odds of enrolling in a four-year school rather than never enrolling in a postsecondary school was 22% stronger when Model II was estimated for just the top achievement quintile than when Model II was estimated for the full longitudinal panel (4.14/3.39=1.22).

TABLE 2

Overview of Independent Variables in Multinomial Logistic Regression Models and Summary of Effects of SES

Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
(Baseline)	(Introduction of SES)	(Introduction of Student, Parent, and School Discussion)	(Introduction of SAT/ACT Preparation and Taking)	(Full Model)
Intercept	Variables of Model I	Variables of Model II	Variables of Model III	Variables of Model IV
Asian/Pacific Islander	SES	Parent-Student Discussion (LH)	Parent Encouraged SAT/ACT Prep	Guidance and Help from School
Hispanic		Parent-Student Discussion (LL)	Prep Course for SAT/ACT	Visited a PEI with Parent
Black		Parent-Student Discussion (HL)	Prep Manual for SAT/ACT	Financial Aid Information Sources
Native American		Parent-School Communication	Exam Planning/ Taking (NY)	Applied for Financial Aid
Female		Parent Discussion with Other Parents	Exam Planning/ Taking (NN)	Applied to a PEI
Number of Siblings			Exam Planning/ Taking (YN)	
Urban				
Rural				
Public				
Prior Test Scores				

In models estimated for full longitudinal panel (Plank & Jordan, 1997):

Estimated Direct Effect of SES on:	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
($p_{4\text{-yr}}$ / $p_{2\text{-yr FT}}$)	1.78	1.68	1.48	1.52
($p_{4\text{-yr}}$ / $p_{2\text{-yr PT}}$)	1.57	1.45	1.25	1.26
($p_{4\text{-yr}}$ / $p_{\text{Never Enrolled}}$)	3.39	2.92	2.29	2.23

In models estimated for highest achievement quintile:

Estimated Direct Effect of SES on:	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
($p_{4\text{-yr}}$ / $p_{2\text{-yr FT}}$)	2.20	2.03	1.79	1.88
($p_{4\text{-yr}}$ / $p_{2\text{-yr PT}}$)	1.86	1.72	1.51	1.42
($p_{4\text{-yr}}$ / $p_{\text{Never Enrolled}}$)	4.14	3.39	2.77	2.53

The proportion of initial SES effect (Model II) that is explained by variables of Models III through V is quite comparable for the highest achievement quintile and the full longitudinal panel. To the extent there is a difference, it is in the direction of a greater proportion explained for the highest achievement quintile. More specifically, by adding the variables of Models III through V, the effect of SES on the odds of enrolling in a four-year school rather than enrolling full-time in a two-year school was reduced to 85% of what it had been in Model II (1.88/2.20=0.85) when estimated just for the top achievement quintile. This reduction is identical to the reduction to 85% seen between Models II and V when estimated for the full sample (1.52/1.78=0.85). The reduction in the effect of SES on the odds of enrolling in a four-year school rather than enrolling part-time in a two-year school was 76% between Models II and V when estimated for the top achievement quintile (1.42/1.86=0.76). This reduction is slightly greater than the reduction to 80% seen when estimated for the full sample (1.26/1.57=0.80). The reduction in the effects of SES on the odds of enrolling in a four-year school rather than never enrolling in a postsecondary school was 61% between Models II and V when estimated for the top achievement quintile (2.53/4.14). Again, this reduction is slightly greater than the reduction to 66% seen when estimated for the full sample (2.23/3.39=0.66).

In summary, these regression models for high-achieving students confirm the association between SES and postsecondary enrollment. The results also provide evidence that social capital, information about higher education, and certain actions on the part of schools, students, and parents explain a large part of this association. These findings hold at least as strongly, if not more strongly, for students in the highest high school achievement quintile as for students throughout the full achievement continuum.

High-Achieving Twelfth Graders: A Closer Look

The previous section described how multinomial logistic regression models were used to draw links between social capital, information, guidance, and actions by student, parents, and schools, and initial enrollment in postsecondary educational institutions for students in the top achievement quintile. A major finding was that while SES accounts for much of the variation in postsecondary enrollment, several of the variables measuring information, guidance, and actions were significant predictors, net of SES. A limitation of these statistical models, however, was that it was not possible to include a number of potentially important aspects of information, guidance, and actions because of the methodological challenges, such as multicolinearity, it would create. In other words, there

are considerable SES differences across various measures of preparation for, and information about, postsecondary enrollment that, although not included in the logistic regression analysis, should be described further.

Table 3 depicts students' planning, preparation, and taking of college board exams by SES quartiles. Several patterns emerged from this crosstabulation. The first row of Table 3 shows that 69% of high SES students had taken the PSAT by 1992, compared to 42.3% of the low SES students — a 27% difference. Further, there is a steady progression across the four SES quartiles.

The next rows of Table 3 relate to whether a student planned to take the SAT or ACT as of 1990 and whether he or she actually had taken one of these exams by 1994. This comparison suggests that students in the highest SES quartile are much more likely to have early and sustained intentions to take college admissions tests, and actually to take them, whereas those in the lower quartiles often become interested during their later grades of high school, or not at all. Fully 89.4% of the students in the high SES group had planned to take the SAT or ACT by 1990 and had done so by 1994 (Yes-Yes), as compared to 69.7% of their counterparts in the lowest quartile.

In contrast, and reflecting a different postsecondary orientation, low SES students were more likely than high SES students to have taken the military entrance exam, ASVAB, by 1992. Nearly 44% of the low SES group had taken this exam by their senior year of high school, as compared to only 15% of the highest quartile.

In addition, the bottom three rows of Table 3 show that students in the high SES quartile exhibit a greater tendency to take advanced placement (AP) tests while in high school. About 21% of the highest quartile, but only 5% of the lowest, had taken an AP test in at least one subject. Higher SES students were also more likely to prepare for the SAT or ACT by taking a preparatory course or by using manuals. However, here, the lowest rates of using these two methods of preparation exists among the low-mid SES quartile, rather than the lowest quartile.

A pattern that emerges throughout these cross-tabulations is that adolescents in the high SES quartile were exposed to more information and engaged at a much higher rate in experiences aimed at postsecondary enrollment. This pattern is exemplified by the progression of cases from low to high SES. While there were no statistical controls at this phase of the analysis, one factor held constant is that all of the students fall into the highest achievement quintile.

TABLE 3
Exam Planning, Preparation, and Taking By SES Quartiles

	Low-SES	Low-Mid	High-Mid	High-SES
		(Percentages)		
Had taken PSAT by 1992 (N=2725)	42.3	52.8	56.5	69.0
SAT or ACT Planning/Taking (No-Yes)	8.6	9.3	11.2	6.3
SAT or ACT Planning/Taking (No-No)	9.5	5.0	1.9	1.0
SAT or ACT Planning/Taking (Yes-No)	12.2	10.9	8.2	3.3
SAT or ACT Planning/Taking (Yes-Yes)	69.7	74.8	78.7	89.4
Had taken ASVAB by 1992	43.7	31.7	27.3	15.0
Had taken an AP test by 1992	5.2	6.4	10.3	20.8
Had taken prep course for SAT/ACT by 1992	19.0	16.4	23.5	35.4
Had used prep manual for SAT/ACT by 1992	59.1	48.9	52.4	67.8

TABLE 4
Student's Assistance With Applications for PEI Admissions and Financial Aid By SES Quartiles

	Low-SES	Low-Mid	High-Mid	High-SES
		(Percentages)		
Received help at high school filling out voc/tech or college applications (N=2704)	48.7	46.9	49.0	50.0
Received help at high school filling out financial aid forms	43.6	47.5	47.3	32.0
Received assistance at high school in writing essays for voc/tech school or college applications	21.7	27.0	30.4	39.2
Received days off from high school to visit voc/tech schools or colleges	41.1	47.4	41.5	48.4
Participated in Talent Search, Upward Bound, or similar program	8.5	3.7	2.0	2.0

TABLE 5
Sources of Information About Applying for Financial Aid By SES Quartiles

	Low-SES	Low-Mid	High-Mid	High-SES
			(Percentages)	
Talked with a high school teacher or guidance counselor (N=2694)	69.2	67.8	69.4	58.1
Talked with a representative from a voc/tech school or college	51.2	45.3	45.1	44.5
Talked with a loan officer at a bank	4.4	5.0	3.7	3.3
Read U.S. Department of Education information	40.3	31.0	33.1	27.4
Read information from a voc/tech school or college	56.5	53.2	54.9	54.2
Read about aid available through military service	38.9	25.2	22.2	18.1
Talked to a knowledgeable adult	62.8	66.6	70.1	67.3

Table 4 shows various aspects of assistance students might receive regarding applications for postsecondary admission and financial aid. There are few differences in the level of help with filling out postsecondary admissions applications. However, not surprisingly, a greater percentage of lower SES students receive help with financial aid applications than those in the highest quartile, 43.6 % v. 32%, and the middle two quartiles are slightly higher than the lowest quartile. Also, because Talent Search, Upward Bound, and similar programs are geared toward helping low SES students, more than four times as many low SES as high SES students participate in such programs, 8.5% as compared to 2%.

Critical items related to sources of information about applying for financial aid are presented in Table 5. As anticipated, low SES students seek out financial aid opportunities at a somewhat greater rate than their high SES counterparts. In the case of talking with a teacher or guidance counselor about financial aid, students in the lower three SES quartiles were very similar (69.2, 67.8, and 69.4%, in the low to high-mid categories, respectively), whereas the highest quartile was about 10% lower (58.1%). More than half of the low SES students (51.2%) had talked to vocational/technical school or college representatives about

financial aid, which is about 7% more than the high SES quartile (44.5%). Also, 13% more of the students in the low SES as compared to the high SES quartile read information about financial aid published by the U.S. Department of Education (40.3% v. 27.4%), and nearly 21% more pursued financial aid information through learning about military service.

In addition to family and guidance factors, the school itself, by marshaling its resources and providing meaningful experiences for students, can be a significant influence on enrollment in higher education. Certainly high-achieving, middle class students often attend schools that can be very different from the schools attended by high-achieving poor students. In order to examine some critical differences in resources designed to increase enrollment in postsecondary schools, several items were considered and tabulated by SES quartiles. The results, drawn from the NELS:88 Administrator Component, are presented in Tables 6 and 7.

TABLE 6

Emphasis of the School on Actions Geared Toward Postsecondary Enrollment By SES Quartiles

	Low-SES	Low-Mid	High-Mid	High-SES
Students who were in schools in which high school staff OFTEN			(Percentages)	
Encouraged 12th graders to visit colleges (N=2370)	71.4	70.1	79.0	82.1
Contacted parents regarding student college selection	33.4	41.7	39.6	53.6
Assisted 12th graders with college applications	80.3	85.4	86.2	91.1
Assisted 12th graders in completing financial aid applications	67.5	73.8	68.2	68.9
Contacted college representatives for 12th graders	73.2	75.0	75.3	75.8
Provided letters of recommendation to colleges and universities	92.5	92.6	93.9	96.8

TABLE 7

School-Based Resources to Prepare Students for Postsecondary Enrollment By SES Quartiles

	Low-SES	Low-Mid	High-Mid	High-SES
Students who were in schools in which half or more of the 12th graders		(Percentages)		
Attended programs on college application procedures (N=2353)	44.8	50.1	51.3	60.2
Attended programs on financial aid	38.4	39.9	39.3	40.1
Attended school SAT/ACT courses	11.4	11.8	15.7	17.4
Attended college fairs	44.8	42.9	48.7	56.4
Met with college representatives	62.1	57.6	65.8	70.3

Table 6 depicts items related to the school's emphasis on actions geared toward postsecondary enrollment. Here, again, there are several advantages present for high SES students, which are influenced by the schools they attend. Eighty-two percent of the high SES students were from schools which reported that the staff often encouraged twelfth graders to visit colleges, as compared to about 71% of students in the lowest quartile. In a similar vein, about 54% of the high SES students were from schools which reported their staff often contacted parents regarding college selection, and 91% often assisted students with college applications, representing about 20% and 11%, respectively, more than students in the lowest SES quartile. However, in the other items shown in Table 6, most notably assistance with financial aid applications, there is not a great deal of variation across different levels of SES.

Table 7 shows a breakdown of school-based resources to prepare students for higher education by SES. For each of the opportunities depicted in Table 7, students in the high SES quartile were more often in schools in which the activity was prevalent than were students in the low SES quartile. The largest difference was in the percentage of high versus low SES students who attended programs on college application procedures (15%), followed closely by the percent attending college fairs (12%). Among students in the high SES quartile, about 60% were in schools in which attending programs on college applications was prevalent and

56% were in schools in which attending college fairs was prevalent. This is in contrast to about 45% of their counterparts in the low SES quartile for both items. There were somewhat smaller SES differences in the other categories, particularly attending programs on financial aid, where the difference was less than 2%.

Parents and families can be instrumental in helping their children progress through high school and proceed into postsecondary schooling. When families and schools work together for the sake of the student, that combination forms an even more potent source of needed support and encouragement. Drawing from the Student and Parent components of NELS:88, Tables 8 and 9 show cross-tabulations of parent-school communications, and parent-student discussions related to the student's postsecondary plans. These tables reveal striking SES differences in the ways in which parents participate in their children's decision-making during the critical, closing years of high school.

In Table 8, the first two items relate to the degree to which parents *were contacted* by their teenager's school about postsecondary plans and course selection. More than half of the parents of high SES students had been contacted at least once by the school regarding their teenager's postsecondary plans, and 35% had been contacted about course selection. Together, these percentages are an average of 18% higher than for parents of students in the low SES quartile. The third and fourth items show a similar pattern — high SES parents also contact their child's high school in regard to the same issues, and the average difference of these items is also 18%. But the largest differences exist in the last two items in Table 8, parents attending programs on educational opportunities and on financial aid. There is nearly a 30% difference between the highest and lowest SES quartiles in parents attending programs about educational opportunities for their teenagers. Fully 55.2% of the high SES parents had attended such programs, as compared to only 25.4% of their counterparts in the low SES quartile. Similarly, 21% more of the high SES parents had attended programs on financial aid. In other words, low SES students claim to have sought more financial aid information than high SES students, but low SES parents have less information about financial aid than high SES parents.

Not only is there greater parent-school contact within the high SES quartile, but there is greater parent-student discussion about schooling and encouragement about postsecondary plans as well. The parent-student discussion items shown in Table 9 measure whether the level of discussion about topics such as course selection, grades, preparation for the SAT or ACT, and whether to apply for college was high or low in 1990, and high or low in 1992. Twice as many students in the low SES quartile were low at both time points as compared to those in the high SES quartile, 41% as compared to 19%. Conversely, the pattern was

reversed for early and sustained discussion (High-High), where the high SES percentage was nearly twice as high as the low SES, 51% versus 27%. Further, approximately 11% more of the parents of high SES students encouraged preparation for the SAT or ACT than those in the low SES quartile, and 41% more visited a college or university with their teenager.

TABLE 8

Parent-School Communications and Actions Concerning Postsecondary Plans During 12th Grade By SES Quartiles

	Low-SES	Low-Mid	High-Mid	High-SES
			(Percentages)	
Parents were contacted by high school AT LEAST ONCE about teenager's plans after leaving high school (N=2523).	28.5	34.6	45.1	51.1
Parents were contacted by high school AT LEAST ONCE about teenager's course selection for entry into college, vocational, or technical school.	21.6	31.0	40.4	35.1
Parents contacted high school AT LEAST ONCE about teenager's plans after leaving high school.	37.7	47.8	53.7	58.1
Parents contacted high school AT LEAST ONCE about teenager's course selection for entry into college, vocational, or technical school.	24.7	35.1	46.5	39.8
Parents attended a program on educational opportunities after completing high school.	25.4	37.8	46.0	55.2
Parents attended a program on financial aid for colleges, universities, or vocational, or technical schools.	30.1	42.5	51.5	51.5

TABLE 9
Parent and Student Communications About Postsecondary Plans By SES Quartiles

	Low-SES	Low-Mid	High-Mid	High-SES
			(Percentages)	
Parent-Student Discussion (Low-High)	15.5	19.1	15.5	14.3
Parent-Student Discussion (Low-Low)	40.9	38.8	29.8	19.4
Parent-Student Discussion (High-Low)	17.2	17.7	17.3	15.9
Parent-Student Discussion (High-High) (N=2743)	26.5	24.4	37.3	50.5
Parent encouraged SAT/ACT prep	76.3	75.8	84.1	87.2
Parent encouraged ASVAB prep	16.6	13.3	8.4	3.8
Visited a PEI with Parent	41.3	54.9	67.3	82.5

TABLE 10
Parent's Communications With Other Parents About Postsecondary Plans By SES Quartiles

	Low-SES	Low-Mid	High-Mid	High-SES
Parents talk to parents of teenager's friends AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH about			(Percentages)	
Things that are going on at teenager's school (N=2492)	52.4	57.9	67.4	72.2
Teenager's educational plans for after high school	49.9	54.8	63.1	68.7
Teenager's career plans	43.3	50.0	57.7	56.6

Finally, it was suggested earlier that higher SES parents tend to have more social capital at their disposal which can be used to facilitate the progression of their children through high school and into postsecondary schools. Table 10 provides evidence of the influence of social capital in that it depicts how high SES parents confer more with each other about the schooling of their children than do parents in the lower SES quartiles. As illustrated in Table 10, 72% of the parents of students in the high SES quartile talk to the parents of their teenager's friends about things that are going on in school at least once a month, some 20% more than parents of students in the low SES quartile. Similarly, 69% of the high SES parents have conversations about their teenager's postsecondary plans, and 57% about their career plans. This is in contrast to the low SES parents, where 50% and 43% respectively have these discussions with other parents, an average difference of about 16%.

Before turning to the discussion of the interviews with guidance counselors, a point about the descriptive analysis of national data in this section should be restated. That is, although the comparisons we discussed were primarily at the extremes (low SES versus high SES), in most cases there was a consistent progression from low SES, to low-mid, to high-mid, and to high SES. Although these are bivariate relationships without the benefit of statistical controls, taken as a whole they tell a persuasive story about the relevancy of socioeconomic status in helping students navigate through high school and ascend to higher education.

Interviews With Guidance Counselors

The analysis of national data in the previous sections casts light on the importance of school-based and familial information and guidance in helping high-achieving, poor students pursue and enroll in postsecondary educational institutions. Taken together, the logistic regression models and the cross-tabulations of various school and family practices by SES demonstrate a pattern of relationships between the steps necessary for enrolling in higher education (such as taking the SAT or ACT, parent-student discussions about college, and financial aid) and the actual enrollment status of students within two years of graduating from high school. However, this analysis misses some important insights of practitioners — guidance counselors — who spend considerable time working both to help students graduate from high school and to prepare them for life beyond high school. In this section we discuss insights gained from interviews with counselors.

As mentioned, in-depth interviews with eight counselors in four large, urban comprehensive high schools were conducted in Spring 1997. Counselors in urban, public

high schools serving at-risk students were purposefully chosen. The size of these schools ranged from about 1,200 to 2,500 students. Each school serves predominately low-income, inner-city students, most of whom are African American; but poor white, Hispanic, Asian and American Indian students attend these schools as well. The racial composition ranged from about 65% African Americans in two of the schools to about 98% in the remaining two. Since each of these is a regular, comprehensive high school, there are no admission standards. Students who attend these schools come from specific zones or catchment areas within the district. While each of these schools is unique in regard to its tradition and cultural organization, one characteristic they have in common is that the overwhelming majority of twelfth graders do not go on to higher education after graduation.

Moreover, most students in the schools in the study do not progress to the twelfth grade in a lock-step fashion from ninth grade to tenth and so on. For example, at one of the sites, 47% of the students were ninth graders, 24% were tenth graders, 16% were eleventh graders, and only 13% were twelfth graders. Many of the students were retained, some transferred between schools, some dropped out of school, and for others their fate was unknown. This pyramid-like structure of the student body, where nearly half are ninth graders and fewer than 10% are twelfth graders at a given time point, existed in all the schools in the study. Further, this pattern of enrollment was common within most of the comprehensive schools in this district. Given that only 15% to one-third of the graduating seniors in these schools were anticipated by counselors to attend college, clearly a small number of the overall population ends up in a postsecondary school.

Alternatives and Competing Postsecondary Destinations

The postsecondary destinations outlined in the current study (four-year college or university, two-year college, and career-focused proprietary schools) do not cover the full range of options for graduates beyond high school. Many students who opt not to continue their schooling immediately after high school find whatever work is available to them on the job market. Some of these young adults begin careers in their chosen fields, while others simply look for a job to provide an income. In any case, work itself is an alternative to postsecondary enrollment.

Various branches of the United States military are also popular postsecondary destinations for students, especially high-achieving, poor students. It is difficult to align the military with other postsecondary destinations because in many regards it is an entity unto itself. Just as college recruiters seek out high-achieving students, military recruiters do

likewise, focusing on those who are academically successful. But students pursue the armed forces for several different reasons. Conceivably, many have the ambition to pursue careers in the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard. Perhaps just as many students see the military as a viable way to fund their college education. On top of this, there is an ongoing campaign by the military to attract talented high school students by advertising programs that will allow recruits to offset a considerable portion of future college expenses. This could be an especially compelling offer for students who aspire to postsecondary enrollment and have high academic achievement but lack the financial resources to carry out their plans.

Guidance counselors who participated in the study reported that their schools' postsecondary enrollment percentage among graduates increases when we include the number of students who enter the military or proprietary school. (The proprietary schools they refer to are typically career-focused, non-degree granting training centers, usually having no criteria for admission beyond the high school diploma or GED.) Although counselors were not asked to report exact figures, some estimated that by including students who pursue the military with college-bound students, they could raise the school's postsecondary enrollment rate by about 5% or more. This inclusion is not necessarily misleading because many students select the military as an indirect path to college.

Scope of the Guidance Counselor Interviews

The primary purpose of the guidance counselor interviews was to add insight to the analysis of national data, described above, and to learn more about the school processes at play in non-selective, urban high schools that facilitate postsecondary enrollment, not only for high-achieving poor and minority students, but for all students. In addition to general questions about length of service, organization of work, and the nature of interaction with students, the interview protocol covered three major areas. These topics included how the guidance staff go about identifying "college bound" students, how they support and nurture students through the college application and enrollment process, and their general views about postsecondary education itself.

We use pseudonyms for both counselors and schools. The four high schools are referred to as Adams, Cooley, Taft, and Wilson. Mr. McCrae is a counselor in a career academy and Ms. Winfield is the guidance head at Adams High. At Cooley High, Ms. Gathers is the head of guidance and Mr. Bentley is the tenth grade counselor. At Taft, Ms. Garrett is the twelfth grade counselor. Finally, at Wilson High School, Ms. Hutchins is the

guidance head and Ms. Heywood is the twelfth grade counselor. Mr. Cunningham is a College Bound counselor who works at Wilson.

The Organization and Nature of Guidance

The guidance counselors in the study were all seasoned veterans with more than 15 years of professional experience, except for one specialized college advisor who was newer to the profession. Some of the interviewees had spent their entire professional careers in high schools, while others had worked in middle schools, and even community colleges. The specialized college advisor, referred to as the "College Bound Advisor," floats among several schools, helping students, both individually and in select groups, prepare and apply for postsecondary admission.

There was some variation in the structure and size of the guidance departments of the schools in the study. In some cases, guidance was organized around grade levels. Typically, one staff member is assigned one grade, but the eleventh and twelfth grades are combined because they are numerically smaller and more manageable than the lower grades. Across the four sites, counselors report case loads of between 300 and 500 students. Although none of the schools reports having a designated "college advisor," the senior class counselor often takes disproportionate responsibility for helping students with postsecondary plans. However, all of the counselors help students negotiate the complexities of high school and advise them about postsecondary options as part of their regular activities.

Paperwork

The size of the caseloads and amount of paperwork take their toll on the degree to which counselors interact with and help students and push them to pursue college. Paperwork was a salient concern in each of the interviews. Some counselors reported spending as much as 60% to 70% of their time on paperwork. Several of them mentioned that they often do their paperwork at home in order to better focus on personal interactions with students during the school day. Ms. Hutchins at Wilson explained that:

> We are pro-student orientated, we have to relate to the students first. Paperwork does prevent us from going out and being as proactive as we would like to be, but we are reactive [also]. Whenever they [students] come in, you know, we stop what we are doing to satisfy their needs. But there is a tremendous amount of paperwork involved.

Her colleague, Ms. Heywood, added that:

> One of the reasons why we have so much [paperwork] is because our goal is to individualize kids. And because of that we have to examine each individual record, and we have to work with the student, and that is what creates a lot of the paperwork.

But the need for vast amounts of paperwork itself is perceived differently by counselors. Some see it as a necessary evil because it reflects on a student's progress, while others question the logic of some of it. In any case, because so much of the counselor's job is managing students' records (and caseloads are often very high), it is sometimes difficult for counselors to establish close personal ties to students. Mr. Bentley at Cooley reported that paperwork, which occupies 60% of his time, along with a caseload of 400 students has impacted on his interactions with students. He stated that:

> The influence, or my contact with them [students], is fleeting, but they know where I am. And, believe me, they find me when they feel they need me. Like I mean now I get a lot of request for credit checks. And, that's a very interesting request because all I do is recount what they [the students] already have on their report cards. But for some reason they want me to interpret for them.

However, the amount of time a counselor spends with a student increases with the student's duration in the school. At Taft, Ms. Garrett estimated that ninth graders are seen by guidance staff, on average, about twice a term, and this increases over time. As students approach grade 12 and graduation, the amount of contact with guidance counselors increases with the need for credit checks and verification of other graduation requirements.

The Nature of Counselor-Student Relationships

In the interviews with counselors, we discovered no hard and fast pattern of interaction between counselors and students. Because most are inundated with their work load, these eight counselors tended to react to the most pressing problems of their students rather than actually being proactive and preventative in their approach. The head of guidance at Adams High, Ms. Winfield, contends that the staff must see their primary job as doing whatever is needed to keep students attending high school. The counselors, she maintains:

> They're not privileged to shut the door, because as soon as you shut the door, there's a knock. And, I always say to them [the guidance staff], 'you have to

> answer that knock' because you don't know. And we don't ever want to be guilty of real emergencies.

The need to help students prepare for and apply to postsecondary schools was not the highest priority for any of the counselors in the study, but it was instead indirectly incorporated into their everyday work life. But clearly, catering to the social and emotional needs of students is viewed as just as important as academic guidance. When asked about the degree to which she helps students simply navigate high school, Ms. Winfield replied:

> Helping students to navigate high school, counseling about everyday life, all day long! …If we are talking about postsecondary plans, your daily activities, everything is going to be pulled in because the child is a total package.

Ms. Winfield's belief is that helping at-risk students pursue higher education is intertwined with fundamental principles of guidance. It has to do with helping adolescents discover their talents and capabilities and allowing their ambitions and aspirations for the future to surface. Sometimes, she contends, basic discussions with students about everyday topics lead to conversations about college, work, and their future plans. In describing how this works, she gave the following example:

> The guidance counselors have a feel for what these children are planning to do after they graduate because they talk with them.... For instance, …the credit checks bring out a multitude of things. And when you're talking about, you know, just answering a simple question: 'What do you feel is your best subject?' 'What subject do you dislike?' And they [students] begin to talk. [Counselors ask:] 'Well, what are you going to do when you graduate? Okay, well, English, you don't like English that's not important, let's get rid of it.' And the kids —students — will look at us like we are really crazy. 'You need English, but you don't like it.' And they then begin to talk.

In each of the high schools, successful graduation itself merits distinction for many students. But defining success, according to guidance counselors, can be done only on a person by person basis. Counselors are aware that many of their students encounter serious problems within their personal lives that impact their schooling and future educational goals. In light of this fact, staying in school until graduation is a major triumph for at-risk students. Financial strain, of course, is a condition with which many students in these school grapple. According to Ms. Winfield:

> If money were there for everyone, at least for the first year, I think that we would have [pause]. Students worry about that. It's constantly here. And,

> when I say worry about that because they're worrying about their survival, sometimes now even in their homes. Enough food, not necessarily clothes because they get clothes. And, when I say they get clothes, people always talk about, 'oh, they go buy their stuff.' No. They borrow each other's clothes, they use each other's clothes, and they look out for each other. But, the light bill, I got to pay mine, you know, the phone being on, things in the refrigerator, or it looks like grandma's running short on her medication, if the check doesn't come, when the mailman is late. And they've lived through this for periods of [pause]. And people always say 'oh, they're accustomed to it.' They never get accustomed to it! They don't like it but they have to, they don't have any other way to go.

The primary assistance given by counselors was helping students cope with the daily stressors of high school. This involved doing many things for the benefit of students such as scheduling their classes, buffering external problems that can interfere with school performance, and advocating for student services. There was a clear perception of student-centered ideology among the counselors in the study. For example, while paperwork takes up a considerable amount of time, several counselors reported putting it aside when students come in with problems.

Most of the guidance counselors interviewed for this study reported maintaining an open-door policy for students. As they see it, students share some of the responsibility in seeking help for planning their future when needed. This is especially the case with college preparation and application. While counselors do a great deal of outreach to students within the classrooms about deadlines, events, and activities regarding college, the burden of follow-up is often left to the students. Furthermore, counselors believe many students simply drop the ball or are not mature enough to recognize the importance of certain matters. On the topic of providing information to students about postsecondary opportunities, Ms. Garrett of Taft asserted:

> And then sometimes it's just a fact that students don't follow through. Once you do the advertising, go to classes, and say 'the financial aid forms are due, come and get your financial aid,' we give the financial aid forms out that many students do not turn them in, or get the paperwork in on time. So, therefore, what's left is the community college.

Mr. McCrae at Adams High School sees the lack of student follow-through as perhaps more detrimental than even the lack of finances for college. When asked how important cost was in the college enrollment equation, he replied:

> Actually, though, that's really not the primary issue because if a student has a 2.5 average and good attendance, that kid can go to any school in the state school [system], comparable to the University of Maryland, and get a free ride.... We go around in the fall and give that information to the students, and hand out the forms, but they don't come back. I don't think I got any this year. And, even the top kids...many times they're late getting the stuff in. But they are told over and over again: 'If you want to go to college, the money is there. The money is there.' But of course they have to meet the criteria. And that's, of course, taking the right classes, getting the right grades, and being motivated — but they can get in. That's a great opportunity, a lot of kids don't take advantage of that opportunity.

Because of limited time and energy, counselors find it difficult to motivate students who they perceive are uninterested in pursuing college, so instead they focus on providing resources and experience for those students who have made their preferences known.

General Perspectives of Higher Education Opportunities

Aside from academic achievement and financial assistance to cover costs, student motivation, ambition, and internal drive can be critical factors related to graduation from high school and a successful progression into higher education, according to some counselors. Unfortunately, counselors in the study believe many of their students lack these critical attributes. Several maintained that if students have no interest in pursuing higher education there is probably little that can be done to persuade them to reconsider their educational goals. In describing a student who was high-achieving, but from a poor family, Ms. Hutchins of Wilson stated:

> I understand that this child doesn't want to go to college, is qualified, but wants to go to work. And, I don't push college personally. If a child wants to go to work, and is geared toward work, I figure, alright, let him go to work this year. Maybe they will find out that they don't want to do this for the rest of their lives, but maybe they do.... And I personally feel that college, the purpose of college is to get a job, to earn some money. To get a job and work in an area where you're interested. Now, if you have that already without the college education, I don't push it, because, you know, it has to be their [the students'] decision. You let them know what is available, the pros and cons of various things, and leave the decision up to them.

Her colleague Mr. Heywood added:

> I find that when you push a student, and they're not motivated, they're not going to do well anyway.

To be sure, there was a perception among counselors that motivation was an extremely important asset for college-bound students to possess. Highly motivated students were believed to be more likely to take demanding academic courses, exploit the full range of school resources (such as SAT preparation courses and college visits) and seek advice and help when needed. In essence, self-motivated and ambitious students were perceived to be more likely to take the necessary steps to build a competitive application for college. However, counselors say they do not see the enthusiasm and zest for learning and higher education learning among students at a level that they would like. Typically, counselors spread blame around to either the students themselves, their families and social environment of the schools, the broader community and neighborhoods, the "school system" — or all of the above. Mr. McCrae of Adams said:

> I think a lot of these kids, I don't know, that we are still dealing with, especially here [if they went to college]...they would be first-generation college grads. And, a lot of the parents, like a lady I seen that came in today, she just wanted to see her son, her daughter, finish high school. Finish high school, and then she thinks she'll go into the service. She didn't mention postsecondary. But many just want to see these kids get out of high school. I think there's no sense of going ahead to sort of blaze a trail for them and also becoming an example.... Many of them just want to [pause]. If they can get out of high school, they figure that's a prize and that's an achievement.
>
> And even those that, who as I said, were very bright and who could do well, if they go to school, they could go to a two-year college. Certainly they [students] feel tentative about going to the four-year school. [However, other counselors] don't feel many of them are making a good choice because they probably aren't prepared.... Many of them also, they aren't academically orientated. I mean, they think that if they pass a class it's fine...there's no motivation. Studying, I say, is out and it's just education — it's not very ambitious. They don't care that much about education, it's not a priority in their lives. And, we just have to change that, I mean, that's the key.

In discussing why so few high-achieving poor students beat the odds and make it into college, the counselors provided several insightful reasons why they believed this to be the case. Mr. Cunningham, the College Bound counselor at Wilson High, said candidly:

> Not all of my colleagues would agree with the things I have to say about the school system. However, I cite the school system on curriculum matters.... I think that we need to take a child and push that child to the highest and most strenuous degree....You know, I know what it is to come through that strenuous curriculum. But I think if you take a five-year-old [child], and you tell a five-year-old to do X, Y, and Z, by and large a five-year-old does it. So tell that five year-old to perform excellent and they will do it. And, keep that five year-old performing excellently through 8, through 10, through 12, and through 15 and they will do it because they are already used to doing it. Because that's a way of life for them....

He went on to say:

> Yes, I want to talk about the zone school curriculum. I want to go ahead and be bold and on tape say that an 80 average in a zone school is not as strong as an 80 average in a city-wide school, or a private school. And, colleges know that! And, I know a lot of people don't want me to say that because it sounds like I'm putting down our kids...[but] that is a fact.

In a similar vein, Mr. Bentley of Cooley also placed the blame on multiple sources, including the student himself or herself, together with their parents, and the school system. He reasoned:

> I think that the bureaucracy of getting into college sometimes is daunting and overwhelming [for students] and it's just like so many obstacles that they don't want to deal with it. And, often times the desire might be there, but the desire comes late, when they haven't really laid the right groundwork. Sometimes the desire is there but the students want to be to themselves.... Their values, ideas, and thoughts, and feelings, mitigate against that kind of thinking. They oftentimes don't have the traditional family, or traditional kind of calling, they often don't have traditional parents.... But see, this is not always because we have some students who have parents who...they see the value of school, and the student still does not want to deal with it for various reasons.... I found that, that the youngsters, they will either rebel against what the parent is doing, or embrace it. Now what causes that, how will we know? They might rebel at this point, they might embrace it later. Sometimes it's on a sliding scale. Sometimes it's rebellion for rebellion's sake.

In order to ameliorate this, Mr. Bentley suggested:

> Well, I think the structure of high schools should be such that the goal of trying to move students on to college should be the paramount...for a lifestyle that is productive, and keeps them out of trouble, allows them some modicum of happiness, and makes society reasonably comfortable. But it seems that

> with every change of leadership, every new thought that comes down the pike at the top, up in the rarefied air, that seems to get lost and the hidden agenda of the persons in those positions, which oftentimes is personal, seems to be in conflict with what should be going on.... We do so many nonsensical things that mitigate against those basic ideas....
>
> But the system, it changes too much, it doesn't stick with anything. You know, someone will come up with this idea, or someone will come up with that one, and we are all running around trying to satisfy the most immediate king. And, the idea that I would think we are supposed to be doing it somehow is lost.

Nearly every counselor mentioned parents and families as being instrumental for the success of students in reaching postsecondary educational institutions. There was a belief that a supportive, nurturing, and involved family can offer a strong foundation for students, and the absence of this puts them at a tremendous disadvantage. However, counselors and teachers, they believe, cannot be the functional equivalent of wise parents and supportive families. Ms. Gathers, the guidance head at Cooley High, explained that:

> We have recognized that without involving our parents, that we are not going to see a significant difference in the success of the students. So, we formed the Family Support Center. So, at the same time as I'm counseling, I'm trying to develop and refine a program that we could put in place and offer the parent. So, we could get more parental involvement and have something to offer them, and at the same time, share with them what's going in the school, what their kids are doing, how they can help us at home with their kids. And I think when the kid sees the parent in the school because we're offering something, then I expect down the road...to see a change in the [student] population, in their performance, in their attitude, and in their behavior, because we will involve parents.

Because of the critical role parents can play in various facets of the schooling of at-risk adolescents, Ms. Gathers expends considerable effort in building family, school, and community partnerships. Her colleague, Mr. Bentley, agrees that informed, assertive parents can be an asset. According to Mr. Bentley:

> Parents, when they are committed to their student going to college, they come in and they are like white on rice, they are like pitbulls — they don't relent. They want to know: 'how do you help my student get to where I want my student to go?'

However, counselors in other schools were less satisfied with the level of parent and family involvement aimed at helping students reach higher education. When asked how

involved parents were in the whole process of college exploration, application, and selection at her school, Ms. Hutchins of Wilson replied:

> Not as involved as we would like for them to be, and that's part of the problem, with the 'poorer children' as we say. Because many of them are not aware of what is needed, they may not even be pushing college, they may be more interested in their children going to work. So, they are interested in those things.... When we invite them [to information sessions], we may have one-third or one-fourth of the ones we invite, they will come in and ask questions and they seem to be interested.

Developing Activities Aimed At Postsecondary Enrollment

In the schools participating in the study, the Guidance Departments are involved in school reform and college-oriented activities of various kinds, but not in the same way as teachers and administrators are involved. Counselors are focused on issues of integrating services for students and marshaling school, family, and community resources in order to better serve the needs of students, whereas teachers and administrators are more concerned with curricular and school organizational reform issues. For example, Ms. Gathers spends a considerable amount of time working, along with her colleagues, to strengthen the Family Support Center at Cooley High. She explains that:

> A lot is going into that because I'm also trying to get a school-based health clinic so that kids don't have to leave the school to get services. They don't have to leave to take their children to get their shots, or to the clinic.... I want to bring everything into the school — the probation officer, social services, we have a WIC program — so all of the services that young people leave school to go to, we want to be able to provide here.

The other schools in the study conduct various activities for students as well, some aimed directly at increasing the number who go on to college. However, there was some consensus among the counselors that such activities are more beneficial to students when they are incorporated into the regular school day. This belief is mainly in response to the perceptions held about the students' lifestyles outside of school. According to Ms. Hutchins at Wilson:

> We have found after school is not a good time to do those kinds of things [activities for exposing students to college] because many of our children work. Those that don't have children [of their own] that they must pick up, so they have other responsibilities after school. We found that we have the most success during the school day, we have a captive audience.

Ms. Hutchins suggested that holding activities during the school day also sends a message to students that the activity is something that is important enough to be endorsed by the school and something they should take seriously.

Availability and Scarcity of School Resources

We found that counselors make an effort to match a student's interest with whatever activity or information is being offered at the school. Mr. Bentley at Cooley referred to this as an "interest-based" approach to exposing students to postsecondary schools and careers. He stated, for example, that:

> The guidance department, we have college representatives to come in and we do it on an interest-based kind of level. We don't want to [have students] listen to a recruiter from, let's say an art school, when they are not interested in art. So, we make an effort to make sure that the persons that are being addressed are interested in the subject matter that is being given to them.

The guidance staff also makes use of bulletin boards, school-wide announcements, and postings around the school as a way to provide information to students. In at least one of the schools, the names of students admitted to college are displayed, alongside their destinations. It is common practice for counselors to convey important messages about college to teachers, who in turn communicate this information to students.

Surprisingly, the interviews revealed little evidence of a concerted effort among counselors to identify only high-achieving students in their schools in order to give them extra help and guidance in applying to college. In a sense, they believed focusing on high-achieving students in these schools would be tantamount to casting too narrow a net for higher education prospects. Few students at these non-selective, urban, comprehensive public high schools manage to maintain high grade point averages, and even fewer earn high SAT or ACT scores. Several counselors complained of the difficulty involved in getting students, even those who earn top grades, to take the PSAT, SAT, or ACT. Mr. Cunningham at Wilson attributes this to the absence of academic press within the school and to the "general malaise" of public education. On the topic of possible reasons why various aspects of college exploration and application are not taken seriously, he commented:

> That probably goes back into the general malaise of college thought, or the lack of college thought. What you find is that this is a senior year activity for too many people, whereas it needs to be an activity for all four years [of high school] in terms of researching, planning, test taking, and so forth. It ends up

> being a senior year thing where people did not take either the PSAT or the SAT in their junior year, or the ACT in their junior year. It comes down to 'wow, I'm a senior, I guess better start this.' And, that's better late than never, and that's good but now you have three years of maybe not-so-good grades, maybe you haven't done anything with these tests, maybe you're not a good standardized test taker…there is just so much handicapping that is done waiting for the senior year. So, that's one of the reasons why we try to touch base with all grades to get them going early.

The "general malaise" of thought about the importance of higher education, or a similar expression using somewhat different terminology, was echoed by several counselors, like Mr. Bentley at Cooley, who talked about a lack of seriousness among students about their schools. According to Mr. Bentley, the climate of passivity and disinterestedness among students extends into many areas of schooling including attendance, punctuality, test taking, and report card grades. For example, on the topic of counselor-student relationships he began a discussion of report cards, wondering why is it that:

> Report cards, for some reason, seem to have lost their importance to students as official documents as to what you've done. Oftentimes it's not only their [students'] fault, many times it is not.... But sometimes there's no concerted effort [by students] to even look at the report card, you know, the report card has no importance. So, they come in and ask me to interpret, to tell them what they've done, when they have it right there in their hands!

To better illuminate the extent of mediocrity in these schools, Mr. Cunningham at Wilson gave the example of the Plus Program. Plus Students, as they are called, are offered many services geared toward higher education, such as waiving application fees, field trips, individualized financial aid and admissions counseling. However, this district-wide program requires students to be in the top 15% of their class in order to become a member. Grading at Wilson High, just as throughout the district, is based upon a 100-point grading system where grades in the 90s translate into As, and a grade of at least 60 is needed in order to pass a course. According to Mr. Cunningham, because students' grades are so low, many schools have to dip into the high 70s (C+) in order to identify the top 15% for the Plus Program, and some must dive further still. But because so many of the college-bound students in these at-risk schools seek community colleges, low grades and test scores do not necessarily derail their plans, and students with C-average grade points have a fairly good chance of enrolling. Regarding community college, the counselors suggest that financial aid, and not academic achievement, is the greater barrier for graduates.

Overall, although the schools in the study are financially strapped, they do provide some students with some of the resources necessary to pursue higher education. Guidance suites and the College Bound offices in each of the schools maintain a repository of information for students such as forms for federal and state financial aid, college brochures and bulletins, college applications (the Common Application), and other useful documents. These collections, however, vary across schools depending upon the people who staff them; some are extensive, while others are sparse.

In some high schools, students have opportunities for individualized help on their applications for college admission and financial aid. Usually, rather than regular counselors, resource people (such as College Bound advisors, like Mr. Cunningham) come into the school to help students on a one-to-one basis, in small groups, and as whole classes. The financial aid workshops are designed to expose students to the various possibilities in regard to funding their postsecondary education, and to help them through the initial phases of putting together a financial aid package consisting of a mixture of grants, loans, and/or scholarships.

Also, schools are allotted a limited number of fee waivers for the PSAT and SAT for which many students, because of their low family income, are eligible. However, the number of eligible students often far exceeds the number of waivers available so guidance counselors dole out these waivers on a case-by-case basis. Because of the limited supply of fee waivers, counselors seldom publicize when they become available, preferring instead to hand them out at their own discretion.

Many schools in the district sponsor visits to colleges and universities and most of the campuses students visit are local, typically in the same metropolitan area. Again, while these trips are open to all students, they focus on students nearer to graduation. Several of the counselors resent not having enough resources at their disposal to begin preparation activities for higher education for students in the ninth grade and up. Intuitively, it made sense to them that early and sustained intervention has the best chance of making an impact on students.

College fairs provide another helpful resource for schools and students. City-wide college fairs are conducted throughout the school year and, according to several of the counselors, schools send "bus loads" of students. These fairs, generally open to all high school students in the district, can be a valuable resource for providing information about higher education and facilitating admission. The counselors we interviewed told us several colleges actually conduct admission screening on-location and students can learn instantly

whether they are admitted to these schools. As Ms. Hutchins and Ms. Heywood at Wilson described, if students bring their high school transcripts and SAT results along with them to the fair, several colleges there are prepared to evaluate those documents and make a decision about admission within a few moments. (However, decisions about financial aid are more complicated and not made on-location.)

The Road Most Traveled: Community College

There was consensus among the counselors that community colleges provide perhaps the most practical, realistic option for many of their students, including the high achievers. As alluded to above, there was a general sense among counselors that regular comprehensive high schools, for various reasons, have not been able to prepare properly even their best students to be academically competitive. Because of the failure of high schools to do a better job of preparing students, Ms. Hutchins at Wilson admits:

> Unfortunately, many of them [graduates] today have to go to the community colleges to become prepared, and I hate to have to say that as an educator, to be prepared to do the regular college work as is required by the four-year colleges.

But not every one sees this reality as a negative consequence for graduates. Mr. Cunningham at Wilson believes that community colleges can provide a path for at-risk students to four-year colleges and universities, and to productive careers.

> That's realistic and that's very often what happens. And community colleges are doing a very good job of being able to take a general population and, you know, and tighten up.... And we encourage kids to go to community colleges rather do nothing. Don't sit out a year...it's a dangerous game.... Because it's always hard to go back [to school]. God bless community colleges. Were they not in position and executing the way they are the whole situation would be a lot worse. So, they are doing wonderful things. It's just unfortunate that for the majority of students that's going to have to be the case.

At Adams High, Mr. McCrae said simply:

> Unfortunately, or fortunately depending upon how you look at it, most of our students in this school go to two-year colleges. For some reason they [students] have a stigma against the four-year schools and I don't understand why.

Other counselors gave examples of articulation agreements their schools have with community colleges, and articulation agreements between community colleges and four-year colleges and universities, that they see as beneficial to students. Some of these are formal agreements allowing high school students to earn college credits while still enrolled in high school, while others are less formal understandings between individual counselors and admissions officers to recommend students. In addition, a local community college and a neighboring university offer a dual degree program, where students whose grades and exams scores are too low for direct acceptance to the university can be admitted to the community college with a promise of acceptance to the university upon successful completion of a two-year program of study at the community college. In essence, while taking courses at the community college, program students are simultaneously matriculating at the university and earning credits for a baccalaureate degree.

According to Ms. Garrett at Taft, there are a number of reasons why pursuing community colleges is a reasonable goal for poor students, even the high-achievers. Suggesting that the relatively low cost of community colleges provides a major incentive for poor students, she went on to add that:

> I think it's a combination of things. I mean I think money is a big important part of the four-year schools, but it seems like a lot of the kids nowadays, not all of them but many of them, are not thinking far enough [into the future]. They go from the ninth, maybe to the eleventh year, and they get to that twelfth year, and they come in and they look at their record and they say 'wow, look at my attendance, look at my grades' and you know, they are not going to be able to [go to college] — even if they had the money, the four-year schools aren't going to take them because they don't have the grades. [But] the community colleges are going to take them no matter what. Now, they might be in a remedial course, sometimes based on their testing, but they are going to get into a community college. How long they stay is a different story; but they will get in.

Barriers to Postsecondary Enrollment: Early Intervention

Although the guidance department in each of the four schools was described as understaffed, there was a commitment in each to at least disseminate information and advise students who have an expressed interest in pursuing higher education. It was clear in the interviews that the emphasis for college advising was placed on eleventh and twelfth grade students — those closer to graduation. Because life after high school appears to be so distant in the eyes of students in the lower grades, particularly the ninth grade, counselors find it

more challenging to motivate them to consider college as an option. Since resources and time are limited, we anticipated that we would find counselors making the choice to focus upon students whose chances of success are perceived as higher. However, what we found is that counselors in the study schools tend to provide more postsecondary-related assistance to students nearest to graduation (i.e., twelfth graders), but not necessarily the highest academic achievers.

According to the counselors we interviewed, the barriers to postsecondary enrollment include, but are not limited to, student motivation, slim school resources, lack of academic preparation, financial cost, and insufficient information about the college preparation, application, and selection process.

Because the regular guidance staff has become inundated with high caseloads and managerial responsibilities, some schools have added auxiliary personnel to work specifically toward preparing students for postsecondary enrollment. One agency, College Bound, has a decade-long track record for helping guidance staff help at-risk students pursue higher education. As mentioned, Mr. Cunningham is a College Bound counselor who works with Wilson High and three other schools. He suggests that having the time and resources necessary to advise, counsel, console, and push students toward college on an individualized level is a potent aspect of College Bound. Mr. Cunningham cautions, however:

> A program like College Bound is going to be only as successful as the students in the school system are successful. Or, if you want to put it another way, a program like College Bound is only going to be as successful as the school system is in preparing students to go to college. We can teach them what to do in term of college planning, preparation, application, financial aid, which we work with the students on, so forth and so on, but…we cannot prepare them academically.

Mr. Cunningham added that one of the reasons why students are not motivated to go to college is because the school discourages it through its absence of academic rigor. He sees a direct connection between what goes on inside the classroom and educational aspirations among at-risk, urban students. The rationale is that is if students are bored, uninterested, and/or failing in school, they turn off to high school as well as to the prospects of higher education. On top of that, the prospects of money for postsecondary school oftentimes cannot compensate for the lack of desire. When asked if, in his experience, programs such as the Last Dollar Grant work (this program pays the difference between the funding a student has and the actual college expenses), Mr. Cunningham responded:

> It is not as compelling or not as much a carrot as it might be…because they [the students] aren't even thinking that far down the road. See, our real challenge is getting them to understand why they should go to college in the first place, and that was something I had to learn coming into this. I thought that kids want to go into higher education…and I had to realize that the first thing to do was to get them motivated to go to school [college].

Still, the regular guidance counselors in the study often spoke highly of the work College Bound is doing, adding that they rely heavily on the program and its resources. While the counselors continue to do what they can to help students progress toward higher eduction, there was appreciation of the expertise College Bound staff bring to the table. For example, Ms. Winfield at Adams praised College Bound highly, saying that:

> We've been blessed that we have College Bound, and here's how College Bound does it. She [the College Bound counselor] sets up workshops with the teachers so the teacher brings an entire class. And, she goes over the financial aid forms with them (students), they have sample copies to use, they fill in [the forms] as she's talking.... If something got past them they didn't understand, they can set up an individual appointment with her afterwards. The parents can contact her. She's here two days a week, which is wonderful…because the time she's spending here is real productive.

The interviews with guidance counselors provided insight into the challenges faced by high-achieving, poor students as they attempt to pursue higher education. Many of these students attend schools, like the four high schools in the present study, where the odds of graduating, let alone moving on to college, are low. Nevertheless, with the help of several key people such as counselors, advisors, critical friends, and wise parents, some students are able to beat the odds and go to college. Unfortunately, far too many do not make it there, and their many talents and skills are lost or diminished.

Summary

The present study represents a continuation of research on reducing talent loss among contemporary high school students. Picking up where previous work left off, it began with a multinomial logistic regression analysis of various factors predicting initial enrollments in postsecondary educational institutions. Only students in the top achievement quintile of the national sample were included in this analysis. However, similar to the earlier study which analyzed a full longitudinal panel extending two years beyond high school and incorporating

all levels of achievement, we found in the present study that controlling for SES, certain aspects of guidance and information about college play a significant role in postsecondary destinations for high-achievers. However, SES remained a major predictor of whether a student goes to college and the type of college or university he or she is likely to attend.

In exploring possible sources of the high SES advantage, we analyzed a series of crosstabulations examining SES similarities and differences across various aspects of preparation for higher education application and enrollment. It was illustrated in this analysis that high SES students more often take the necessary exams and courses for college admission, and they talk more often to teachers, guidance counselors, and their parents about their future plans. In addition, high SES students attend schools where they are more likely to receive help with applications, visit colleges and universities, be contacted by a college representative, and be encouraged to attend a postsecondary school. But perhaps the most salient factor in the analysis was the role of parents in steering their teenager toward college. The results suggests that high SES parents tend to go much further than their low SES counterparts in providing the nurturance and guidance necessary for successfully pursuing higher education.

In search of further insights into the nature of the postsecondary enrollment process for high-achieving poor students, the final component of this study is based on interviews with guidance counselors drawn from a troubled, urban school district. Here, we compiled the counselors' own words related to what it takes to help at-risk students move on to higher education. Counselors discussed both the most pressing problems they face in simply helping at-risk students graduate from high school as well as challenges associated with grooming students for higher education.

Discussion

Taken together, the analysis of the national data along with the guidance counselors' interviews provide some insight into sources of talent loss among high-achieving poor students. Moreover, they provide strong empirical evidence of the relationship between SES and enrollment in higher education. The results of the analysis of the national student, parent, and school data suggest that early and sustained school-based interventions, to inform students about applying to postsecondary schools and for financial aid and help them make wise choices about course selection, have a better chance of increasing the rate at which high-achieving students reach college than interventions that are inconsistent or happen too

late during high school. Likewise, early and sustained attention to higher education in the form of parent-student discussions, parent-school communication, and communication among parents whose children attend the same school also has a significant impact on postsecondary enrollment, taking SES into account. The finding that early and sustained interventions are ideal and preferable to others is supported not only in the present study of the high-achieving students, but was found in earlier research to be consistent throughout the achievement distribution (Plank & Jordan, 1996). In other words, all students, regardless of their level of academic achievement, appear to benefit from interventions that begin early and remain throughout high school.

However, the interviews with guidance counselors suggest that, in some cases, entire schools and school systems rather than individual students are at risk of educational failure. For many reasons, creating an environment in which every student is encouraged to pursue higher education and is given the needed support was not a priority in any of the schools we visited. While we found little evidence that students were dissuaded from considering college, counselors did talk of the students' needs to focus on "realistic" goals — goals that adults believed students might actually attain.

Guidance counselors in the present study identified several barriers to higher education for poor, high-achieving students: weak academic preparation (an ineffective curriculum), limited school resources for college-related activities, few staff resources to provide individualized help, low support from the students' home and community, and a general lack of student motivation. Without question, the rigor of the curriculum is a critical ingredient involved in reducing talent loss. Counselors contended that providing information and guidance about higher education can help insofar as the students are academically prepared to survive in college. Inspiring students to apply to college without teaching them the skills, knowledge, and work habits they will need in order to be successful is tantamount to setting them up for disappointment and frustration.

Despite best efforts, counselors are able to reach relatively few high-achieving at-risk students. Because the student-counselor ratios often exceed 400 to 1, and resources aimed at helping students reach higher education are limited, many students having academic potential are missed. While we anticipated that counselors might adjust to their workloads and limited resources by focusing upon students who seemed most likely to be successful, there was little evidence of this. However, we found that the emphasis on pursuing higher education tended to be placed upon twelfth graders, students nearest graduation, who can be seen as part of an elite group of survivors in the study's schools. Unfortunately, most of what was done to help students happened late and infrequently, rather than early and often.

Evidence from both the national data analysis and interviews with counselors underscores the importance of parents, families, and communities in influencing students to pursue higher education. In the statistical analysis, the logistic regression models present clear and consistent evidence of the benefits of a family's social capital, together with direct parental involvement in school, on postsecondary enrollment. However, according to the counselors, school, family, and community partnerships were weak in the schools we visited, and they are generally lacking in comprehensive high schools throughout the district. Although there was widespread agreement among counselors that parents and communities can be invaluable allies for schools, real-world constraints such as logistics, miscommunication between families and school staff, and the lack of resources impede the degree to which partnerships with parents and families are formed and cemented. Because of the concentration of poverty and the small proportion of parents of public school children in the school district who have attended college, the level of education-relevant social capital within families of at-risk students is often low. However, poor parents and parents of color have a great deal to offer schools if they are truly empowered to do so. It seems certain that in order to break the cycle of educational failure and talent loss, and to help open the doors to higher education for at-risk students, strong interventions that unify parents, schools, and communities for the sake of the students must be established and maintained.

Finally, the student motivation factor was seen as both an outcome of ineffective schooling as well as a predictor of other outcomes such as school performance and higher education enrollment. Counselors believe that inner-city public schools, along with the troubled neighborhoods they are embedded in, often contribute to leveling the aspirations of students by holding low expectations for them and failing to marshal the necessary resources for high achievement. When students internalize low expectancies, their level of motivation to do academic work can plummet, leaving them few reasons to be hopeful about their education future. Challenging students to work hard and set high goals is a complex problem facing troubled high schools. Future research is needed to find creative ways to motivate and empower them to pursue higher education.

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